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2 February 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Herbert E. Meyer  
Vice Chairman, NIC

SUBJECT : Israel and the SAs

1. Ted Atkeson and other military experts clearly differ on how severe a threat to Israel's security is posed by installation of Soviet missiles in Syria.

2. I raise the possibility that Ted Atkeson is correct -- but that the Israelis will refrain from action on political grounds. More precisely, that for the first time in a long while a political judgment will be reached to accept a powerful threat to the country's security.

3. The logic behind an Israel decision to do nothing runs like this: We recognize that the Soviet missiles deny us mastery of the air, and thus leave us much more vulnerable to surprise attack. But the US government and US public do not recognize this; indeed there is scarcely a word about these missiles in the press. Moreover, after taking out the Iraqi nuclear plant and going into Lebanon -- not to mention the massacre at the Palestinian camps -- we are now perceived as trigger-happy and aggressive.

Hence a military strike now would bring intolerable consequences. The US government, under pressure from the Congress and the media, would take severe actions that, over time, would pose a greater threat to our survival than do the Soviet missiles. The good will of the US is too vital to lose. Thus we must do nothing, at least for now. And we recognize that should hostilities break out, we will suffer a devastating -- but not fatal -- first blow. But this is the price we must pay to assume full US support at that time.

4. This analysis is both plausible and chilling. [redacted] political constraints on Israeli behavior could affect the region's strategic balance.

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Herbert E. Meyer

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